

*Says his problem-solving work on behalf of our local veterans and families has only just begun*

Rochester, MN – Today at Soldier's Field Veterans Memorial, Congressman Walz received the Legislator of the Year Award from the National Association of County Veterans Service Officers (NACVSO).

"I am deeply honored and humbled to receive this award," said Congressman Walz. "Our County Veterans Service Officers are the advocates on the front lines every single day fighting for veterans and their families. I am proud to partner with them to improve the policies that can make life better for the brave men and women who have served our country in uniform."

Rep. Walz received the award in recognition of his outstanding record in Congress working on veterans' legislation. Walz enlisted in the Army National Guard at the young age of 17, and retired 24 years later as Command Sergeant Major. He is the highest ranking enlisted soldier ever to serve in Congress and a member of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

"Congressman Walz is a soldier's soldier," said Jim Goltart, President of the Minnesota Association of County Veteran Service Officers. "Whether he is fighting for a new GI bill, fighting to make sure that MN National Guard gets the benefits they had been promised, or fighting to increase the mileage rate for veterans traveling long distances to VA hospitals, Congressman Walz's passion for helping veterans has been unwavering."

"This award was established about 15 years ago to honor the Congressman or woman who the National Association of County Veterans Service Officers felt had worked the hardest for veterans. There have been years where no award was given because we didn't feel it was merited," said James Young, President of NACVSO. "However, this year Congressman Walz's work clearly deserved recognition as it will help us fulfill the obligation proclaimed by President Abraham Lincoln; 'to care for him, who shall have borne the battle and for his widows and orphans.'"

Recognizing that a grateful nation never rests in honoring its sacred contract with the men and women who risk life and limb in our national defense, Rep. Walz outlined future actions that are needed to address the challenges that continue to face veterans who are readjusting to life after the military. There are currently over 500,000 claims awaiting disability rating decisions, over 190,000 have been waiting over 125 days. When a decision is made, 17% are inaccurate. As a result, too many disabled veterans today are waiting far too long for accurate disability ratings.

"Too many veterans still face a mountain of paperwork and bureaucratic red tape when applying for service-related VA disability benefits," said Walz. "This is unacceptable. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs can and must do better in making fair and timely decisions on these disability claims. These benefits can make the difference in whether a veteran can afford to enjoy a quality lifestyle in the civilian workforce or retirement. I look forward to working with the experts on the front lines – our CVSOs – on legislation to streamline the VA claims process."

I also look forward to working with CVSOs to make sure they have the tools they need to serve our veterans and their loved ones."

NACVSO is an organization made up of the local County Veterans Service Officers who assist veterans in developing and processing their claims. They work collaboratively with the VA and other nationally chartered veterans' organizations to ensure veterans and their dependents receive the benefits they have earned.

Each of Minnesota counties has a local veteran service officer on staff that is available to meet with veterans and provide assistance and support. Congressman Walz's veterans casework staff provide additional support for local veterans and CVSOs when their efforts reach roadblocks in the system. Veterans in need of assistance can find their local CVSO in the phonebook under the county offices or can contact Congressman Walz's office at 507-206-0643.